

Those Were The Days

Remember? What do I remember. Well, if I were a real oldtimer, I would recall that John Low, around 1900, drove a Stanley Steamer into Duxbury. It was the town's first automobile. John Low, who lived on the present site of the David Collins' house on Washington St., also rode in the first Ford (a runabout) in town. Its owner was Dr. Nathaniel Noyes, father of the late Edwin Noyes.

I would remember that Fanny Davenport in the 90's, lived in Melbournie Hall, off Washington St., later owned by the late Mrs. Margaret Metcalf, whose son, Richard, now lives in the boathouse that was on the estate. I would remember that Powder Point was once a pasture, with no street lights, years before Upland Rd. and King Caesar Rd. were built.

I would remember when Frederic Knapp became Duxbury's first fire chief, to be succeeded by Eden Soule, whose brother, Sydney, served as a Duxbury selectman. Later chiefs were H. E. Merry, Eben Briggs, George (Mike) Butler and Howard Blanchard, the current chief.

In Knapp's day, the "bucket brigade" used hand-pumpers or tubs,

To page 17

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

From page 4

as they were called. In 1915 the department acquired a new hose and equipment. In Knapp's day (around 1907-10) the town had several one-horse express wagons equipped with shovels, hose and fire extinguishers. One of Duxbury's one-horse wagons was years later exhibited at a Sportsmen's Show in Boston.

I would remember when Duxbury had 3 constables, but no police department. The chairman of the board of selectmen was considered police chief until Sydney Soule made some changes.

I would remember when the terrible storm of 1898 (November) blew down most of the windmills on Powder Point, along with a few houses, including a cider mill on West St. In those days the town had sawmills and several blacksmith shops, but there were no longer tinkers in Tinkertown.

Mrs. Joseph Bolton can remember as a little girl when there were sleigh races along St. George St., past the Wright estate (site now of DHS) during winters that were so snowy. She recalls 3 or 4 years of such races beginning around 1905.

Those were gay, carefree Sundays for folks in horse-drawn sleighs. When it got cold, they raced on the larger ponds, and one year, when the Bay froze over, Mrs. Bolton's father, Henry A. Briggs, ferried sleighfuls of merry passengers out to Clark's Island and back. She places that frigid day between 1902 and 1904, and thinks the sleigh headed for Clark's Island around 6 a.m. They had to return before the incoming tide buckled the ice into floes.

Her father thought nothing of packing food and bedclothes into a sort of covered wagon and camping overnight in the woods around Middleboro. When Mrs. Bolton was a girl, she rode a pony. But life had grimmer moments.

Sometimes there was no wind for the windmill that pumped water for the horses in the Briggs' livery stable, and the family had to use hand-pumps. And during severe blows when there were high course tides, it was not unusual for the cellars of the house and barn to be flooded.

She remembers when the telephone to the Gurnet -- one of the first in town -- was installed in her house. She can also remember when, in the storm of 1902, the barge "Etta A. Stimpson" was grounded off High Pines. Tons and tons of coal were dumped on the beach, to be promptly wheeled away in barrows and tip-cart.

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